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SUBJECT: USAID-SPONSORED WORKSHOP ON DISPLACED
PERSONS IN IRAQ, 3-4 DECEMBER 2007, AMMAN JORDAN

11. SUMMARY: Representatives from Iraq's Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) were among the 75 participants discussing the considerable challenges in meeting the immediate and long-term needs of Iraq's Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as well as the new complexities of a burgeoning population of vulnerable Iraqis returning from neighboring countries. In addition to MoDM officials, other participants attending the December 3 and 4 workshop in Amman, Jordan, included representatives from USAID/Washington, USAID/Iraq, the State Department, the International Office for Migration (IOM), the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), key United Nations (UN) agencies, international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Regional NGOs, Iraqi NGOs, civilian representatives from Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), international donors, the U.S. Embassy in Jordan, and the U.S. Embassy in Iraq. In addition to creating a forum for plenary discussions, the workshop accomplished two major working objectives: First, participants identified the five priority areas requiring immediate attention to allow the Government of Iraq to properly prepare and respond to the needs of Iraq's displaced; and second, participants identified and prioritized specific recommendations for consideration by MoDM to help the Ministry increase its ability to coordinate the various initiatives, programs, responses, and resources required to assist Iraq's displaced populations. END SUMMARY.

Background

12. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), nearly 1.2 million people have been displaced in Iraq since February 2006, adding to an existing caseload of more than 1.2 million. In addition, an estimated 2.2 million Iraqis have sought refuge in neighboring countries, particularly in Jordan and Syria.

(Note: On 1 December 2007, UNAMI officially began using a new organizational strategy called the International Compact for Iraq (ICI) in place of the former Cluster system. End Note)

¶3. Beginning in October 2007, several sources including MoDM, reported that improved security was among several reasons stated by some displaced Iraqis to return home, especially to Baghdad. Current estimates of the rates of displacements, the numbers of returnees, and the reasons for their return vary widely, as do present response efforts and resources from USAID, the military, the United Nations, and the Government of Iraq.

¶4. As the U.S. Government's lead coordinator on internal displacement, USAID has been assisting Iraq's displaced and vulnerable populations since 2003. To help ensure a coherent response from the U.S. Government and the international community, USAID works closely with the U.S. Department of State and other U.S. Government entities, U.N. agencies, international organizations, NGOs, host governments, and local institutions.

¶5. During its initial response, USAID provided assistance to Iraq's displaced by providing temporary shelter, non-food emergency items such as blankets, hygiene kits, cooking stoves, implemented water and sanitation projects, temporary health care activities, and short-term income generation projects among other

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interventions. Nevertheless, complexities involving religion and tribal issues, insecurity, personal and sectarian threats, and a large military presence all combined to blur a comprehensive or coordinated response. Current USAID interpretation of the situation is that priorities are less clear, objectives are less understood, and an overarching agreement on response or assistance policy unknown.

¶6. By November 2007, the size of Iraq's displaced population and the complex factors surrounding the displacement created additional challenges for USAID including unanswered legal and policy questions, program implementation obstacles, security impediments and national authority and capability questions.

¶7. It was under this increased concern and understanding of the complexities affecting a well-coordinated response to the Iraqi displacement that the concept for the Amman workshop was born. From the perspective of USAID, the challenges presented by the unique nature and current state of a longer-term Iraqi displacement were not understood fully by the international community at large, nor by the U.S. Government.

¶8. The confusion was further enhanced by a heightened awareness of IDP issues among the international media, from the United States Congress, the State Department, USAID and many of those working in Iraq including the military forces, PRTs, United Nations, and others. This sometimes-embellished attention created incomplete reporting from diverse and unconfirmed information sources, and created unnecessary confusion, misperceptions, and misunderstandings.

¶9. On December 3 and 4, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), together with USAID/Iraq, convened a workshop conference in Amman, Jordan to better define the humanitarian challenges posed by IDPs and returning families in Iraq. The workshop's goals centered on a better understanding of the displacement and the current assistance efforts in response to the displacement, identifying best practices and possible new approaches for future assistance, identifying gaps in current assistance delivery, and improving the way that humanitarian responders communicate and coordinate.

¶10. The event brought together 75 participants from the U.S., Jordan, and Iraq who are working on Iraq displacement issues, including representatives from the MoDM, NGOs, U.N. agencies, international organizations, Multinational Force-Iraq (MNF-I), PRTs, and USAID. NGO representation included ACTED, CHF International, Danish Refugee Council, International Medical Corps, International Relief and Development, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Mercy Corps, Mercy Hands, NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI), People in Need, and Relief International. U.N. Agencies were represented by International Organization for Migration (IOM), U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), U.N. Development Program (UNDP), U.N. - HABITAT, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), U.N. Office for Project Services (UNOPS), U.N. World Food Program (WFP), and U.N. World Health Organization (WHO). In addition,

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representatives from the Iraq Red Crescent Society and the International Committee of the Red Cross participated in both days of the workshop.

¶11. The first day of the conference convened several panel briefings, in which each of the stakeholder groups provided an overview of their activities in Iraq and identified challenges to their work. Overarching themes included the need for greater coordination among the various stakeholders and better information sharing and prioritization of issues. U.N. country team members reported on short, medium, and long-term plans for increased engagement in Iraq issues, including an enhanced U.N. presence in Iraq. Participants appreciated the presence and full engagement of three representatives from MoDM, including the deputy minister, which ensured that conversations and suggestions could reach senior Government of Iraq officials.

¶12. On the conference's second day, the MoDM provided an overview of the Ministry's activities, such as its central role as a coordinating agency, the intra-governmental communication process to recommend humanitarian assistance projects for funding, and the MoDM expanded role in coordinating humanitarian activities following the 2006 displacement crisis.

¶13. Participants then divided into five working groups to propose ways to improve the following: coordination among humanitarian actors and with

the MoDM; information management; how humanitarian actors can support specific, MoDM identified needs; improved activity implementation with provincial authorities; and creating the humanitarian space needed for relief workers. In closing the workshop, David Shearer, U.N Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General in Iraq & Resident/Humanitarian

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Coordinator for Iraq, noted that the United Nations is implementing several measures to improve coordination among humanitarian actors, cooperation with the Government of Iraq (GOI), communication between military and civilian actors, synchronization among U.N. agencies to collect, store, and analyze data, and increased financing for humanitarian activities.

----- Workshop Recommendations -----

¶14. MoDM officials, U.N. representatives, and NGO leaders stressed the need to continue assisting MoDM to build capacity to coordinate, communicate, and respond to emergencies. Recognizing the need for more efficient collection and dissemination of information, participants recommended the development of clear information management priorities, coordination of cross-sectoral assessments, and the establishment of clear, transparent lines of communication. To address the challenges of engaging local and provincial GOI officials (in addition to national GOI representatives), the conference attendees recommended that the PRTs facilitate regular coordination meetings between local institutions and local government officials, including discussions with local branches of the MoDM.

¶15. According to workshop participants, coordination among the military, PRTs, GOI, U.N., and NGOs was among the most difficult challenges facing international aid workers in Iraq. In

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addition to increased coordination in Iraq, participants also noted the eventual need to move most coordination among humanitarian organizations from Jordan to Iraq. Although PRT and NGO representatives disagreed as to how using military presence and participation in humanitarian activities impacts the ability for humanitarian actors to perform, all agreed on the need for additional opportunities for dialogue, increased civil-military coordination training, and the development of mechanisms for ongoing information sharing. (Note: USAID will release a detailed report by the end of December on the recommendations identified by the workshop participants. End Note).

----- Comment -----

¶16. Returnees: Recent international media has highlighted an increase in Iraqis returning to places of origin. Conference participants cautioned that diverse reports of return numbers are not confirmed by the GOI and are not yet at levels of concern. Moreover, there was consensus that the relatively small number of returnees should not force humanitarian responders to shift

focus away from current IDP caseloads, host communities, and other vulnerable populations, who continue to face emergency conditions. USAID implementing partners will continue to monitor IDP movement and refugee return and are prepared to respond should increased returnee needs materialize.

¶17. USAID will also initiate necessary actions to form a working coordination cell to serve as the point of contact with MoDM to begin work on the immediate recommendations suggested by workshop participants and agreed to by the MoDM. In addition, follow-up sessions to the workshop will be organized in Baghdad to help assure continuing momentum gained from the workshop discussions. USAID has drafted a strategy for return and reintegration, and in anticipation of additional funding for continued USAID IDP activities in 2008, will use the return strategy to guide U.S. Government activities throughout the next year.

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